



News Release

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Washington's kids among least protected in the nation, says first-ever report

Kindergarteners in state have highest immunization exemption rates

OLYMPIA — Washington kindergarteners do not meet state or national goals for any required immunizations when they enter school, according to a report today by [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

(http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6021a4.htm?s_cid=mm6021a4_w).

Our state has the highest exemption rate in the country; 6.2 percent of kindergarteners have a parent-signed exemption form for one or more vaccines. Washington's exemption rates have more than doubled over the last 10 years.

"All parents want their kids to have a healthy start," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky, "and making sure they have all of their immunizations before going to school is one of the best ways to keep them healthy. Kids who aren't fully immunized aren't fully protected."

The data from the 2009 — 2010 school year show that our state's kindergarten coverage for required vaccines (including polio, whooping cough, measles, hepatitis B, and chickenpox) ranges from 88 percent to 93 percent. The state and national goal for individual vaccines at kindergarten entry is 95 percent.

Immunizations save lives. Diseases can spread quickly in schools and child care centers, and we've had outbreaks of whooping cough, measles, and other diseases in our state recently. Unimmunized children are more likely to get and spread diseases that vaccines can prevent.

"Most of today's parents weren't around to see how bad diseases like measles and whooping cough were before vaccines helped bring them under control," says Secretary Selecky. "We've done a good job fending off those diseases with vaccines, but we can't be complacent; we're seeing them start to make a comeback and too many of our kids are vulnerable."

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A new state law that takes effect on July 22 changes the process to get an immunization exemption. It says that if a parent or guardian wants to exempt their child from school or child care immunization requirements, they must first get information from a licensed health care provider about the benefits and risks of vaccinations. The provider must then sign a form or letter confirming that the parent got this information and the form must be turned in to the school or child care.

Health officials hope the law will reduce the number of “convenience” exemptions (parents who turn the form in even when their child is vaccinated). School nurses have access to Washington’s CHILD Profile Immunization Registry to help parents turn in complete and accurate immunization records.

More [information on the law](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/schools/default.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/schools/default.htm) is available online. Renewed commitment of many public and private partners including school nurses, health care providers, health insurance providers, local health agencies, and others is vital to improving our exemption rates.

All recommended vaccines for kids under 19 are provided at no cost through the state’s Childhood Vaccine Program. Health care providers can charge an office visit or administration fee; this may be waived for those who are unable to pay. Parents are urged to go to their regular health care provider for childhood immunizations and questions about vaccines. For help finding a health care provider or an immunization clinic, contact the [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) in your community or call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

Our [state and county coverage and exemption rate data](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/schools/reportdataintro.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/schools/reportdataintro.htm) are online. More information on childhood immunizations is on the Department of Health [immunization program website](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize).

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